Global Experiential Learning Program

Program Overview
The Global Experiential Learning (GEL) program under the Dean of Students Office integrates travel, education, and service learning to empower students with knowledge, skills, and values to use as they continue their careers at the UA and beyond. GEL actively seeks to provide sustainable service learning experiences, domestically and internationally, to promote interdisciplinary learning, civic engagement, career development and leadership for students. GEL provides students the opportunity to look at unique situations through multiple lenses and use critical thinking to develop their own ideas. The themes of study and experiential learning include social justice, environmental justice, and cultural immersion.

GEL programs are designed to support students' academic schedules, minimize costs to enable broad access to all students, and provide hands-on learning experiences that support career or graduate school readiness among students. GEL offers day-long to three week long credit bearing long opportunities in winter session, spring break, and summer. GEL offers students invaluable opportunities to learn about diverse communities around the world and develop cultural competencies that are essential for engaging in an increasingly diverse world.

In 2017-2018 academic year, nine programs were developed by GEL (Table 1).

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Participants
A total of 81 unique students participated in the GEL program in 2017-2018. Fifteen students (20%) participated in more than one trip and 6 students (8%) participated in 3 or more trips.
Participant Demographics:
- 74% Female
- 26% Male
- 42% Seniors
- 29% Juniors
- 47% Hispanic
- 21% American Indian
- 10% Asian American
- 5% African American
- 54% First Generation College Student
- 53% Pell Grant Recipient
- 43% College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
- 14% College of Science
- 7% College of Education
- 7% College of Management
- 85% Arizona Residents

Data Sources
- Program Application
- Journal Reflections
- Video Journals
- Photos
- Pre-Post Assessment
- Program Curriculum
- Video Commercials

Methodology
Data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis between participants, in order to understand cases individually while building a grounded coding scheme (Boyatzis, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Then cases were compared and contrasted in search of patterns and themes across cases and type of GEL program (i.e., international versus domestic), as well as focusing on discrepancies between cases.

Evidence Based Assertions
Data revealed that domestic GEL programs provided students with new experiences and opportunities to gain cultural and policy knowledge they could use toward personal and community growth goals. Data from students participating in GEL International Programs showed that students demonstrated gains in the following domains: Knowledge Acquisition, Navigational Skills, Global Citizenship Development, Cognitive Development, and Identity Development (Figure 1). The subsequent section includes descriptions of students’ views of the domestic GEL Programs, and also discussion of the five outcome domains of GEL International Programs through the provision of supporting evidence from students’ written reflections.

Figure 1. GEL Outcome Domains.
Domestic GEL Programs
Domestic GEL Programs were short trips of no to low cost (free - $25.00). The combination of low cost, and short 1-3 day programs made the trips accessible to students who otherwise are not likely to participate in off-campus immersion programs.

“I think this type of trip is convenient for a lot of students, especially myself, coming from a low income family.”

“A GEL experience is very accessible and optimal for my situation, as I would otherwise not be able to afford the costs, or miss the classes.”

“A day trip is perfect for me, being a person with a busy schedule. It allows me to partake in opportunities without the threat of falling behind in school.”

Beyond accessibility, students reported that Domestic GEL Programs were desirable over other study abroad opportunities because they provided students with opportunities to acquire knowledge about a particular topic, policy, or cultural issue that they could either use to shape their own behaviors and thinking, or to bring back to share with their community.

“I expect to learn how to approach and influence people, and expose them to things they can do to help sustain our environment.”

“I hope to learn how to be more socially responsible, especially in terms of social behavior that is harmful to the earth and creatures living here.”

“I want to understand Native’s struggles to be better allies with them. I know I would never go through their struggle, but I feel by knowing the issues they face I can help in some way.”

“I hope to bring back resources and stories to help humanize the experiences of students who face issues with immigration.”

International GEL: Navigational Skills
Students described dissonant experiences in airports and markets where signs were not in English, and where English was not the language of communication. All participants in GEL International Programs stated that these experiences helped them gain confidence in their ability to navigate through unfamiliar situations.

International GEL: Knowledge Acquisition
All students described acquiring knowledge in three areas (historical, political, and cultural). Students described learning about historical events (e.g., Vietnam War/American War of Aggression, Cambodian Genocide, Hawai‘ian history) that they either knew nothing about prior to participating in GEL, or they only had a one-sided perspective prior to their participation. Similarly, students described expanding what they knew about international politics, and how American policies impacted other countries. And finally, students described their participating in GEL as true educational travel, where they learned much about local cultures.
“Another unsettling feeling arose as I began to realize that the events that took place in Cambodia [the genocide under the Khmer Rouge] were never mentioned in my classroom. I had never learned about the events that took place to the people of Cambodia, and nor would I have ever acknowledged [them] if I did not participate in this GEL Program.”

“I learned about the rule how immigrants who serve time are subject to deportation [from America], despite having never been to their ‘home’ country. I learned that immigration is a long process that can be indefinite. In America recently, I knew that more and more people were getting deported but I didn’t know the details… I learned about the new perspective and struggles that immigrants go through just to live in America. I learned that there needs to be a better immigration system in the U.S.”

“I learned a lot about the side that the world doesn’t talk about usually. A lot of the world knows Hawaii as this luxurious “paradise” with beautiful trees, beaches, luaus, etc., and not much else. There is so much history and culture that goes under the rug when talking about Hawaii that this trip definitely shined some light on.”

International GEL: Global Citizenship Development
Prior to participating in GEL, all students described global citizenship as a positive goal, but were unsure of what it really meant. The majority of participants indicated that GEL let them learn through cultural immersion, and students reported developing both a clearer understanding of what it meant to be a global citizen, and a greater commitment to being a good global citizen.

“Before the trip, my thoughts on becoming a global citizen were very vague, and I honestly didn’t know how significant it would be to become one. It [GEL] made me appreciate my own culture and also open my perspective onto how other cultures are unique but usually share similar qualities to one another...Nothing in this world can be accomplished alone. It is always important to make sure we can all work together to strive to a common goal and fix problems together.”

“By immersing ourselves in the culture and getting to talk to locals, I learned what it means to be a global citizen. A global citizen is vastly different from a tourist. Global citizens are aware of what is going on in other countries. They don’t just visit other countries and take pictures, but they learn about the culture and contribute to society. When we visited the UA micro-campus and taught at the elementary school in Phnom Penh, it gave our trip purpose. We were able to volunteer alongside students and give back to the community.”

International GEL: Identity Development
GEL programs provided students with an important opportunity to reflect on their own racial and ethnic identities, either because they were visiting their heritage countries, or by drawing parallels between their racial and ethnic struggles, with those of the people in the countries in which they were traveling. And for some students, this personal identity development also led to stronger bonds with their refugee and/or immigrant parents.
“I gained a better understanding and comfort with the meaning of being a Cambodian-American; this was something I struggled with while growing up. I also gained a greater appreciation and sense of humility with the history of my family, and how they built their lives in the US....I think I also surprised myself in Cambodia. As I grew up, I lost much of my language and culture. However, when I was there, I felt more natural speaking my native language; something I used to be very uncomfortable with. I also surprised myself by pushing myself out of my comfort zone to talk to the locals and got to know them....I also think that it created a stronger bond with my parents; what they would describe to me while I was growing up was put into perspective and became real. They also feel more comfortable in talking about their experience before they came to the US.”

International GEL: Cognitive Development
Beyond acquiring knowledge about history, politics, or culture, data showed that some students developed new perspectives and ways of understanding events, issues, and themselves.

“This trip gave me a new perspective on Asian culture and helped me understand my own culture. Being able to talk to other Asian American students on this trip, we discussed how our experiences have been growing up in Asian and American cultures. I learned so much about myself and others.”

“By participating in GEL Experiences I am learning more about cultural backgrounds, how others view the world, the positive and negative historical experiences [e.g., the Cambodian Genocide] that various groups of people have endured...it is beneficial to understand different cultural backgrounds and how others connect with the world.”

What appeared to distinguish students who evidenced cognitive development from those who did not, was their meaning making strategies. Those students showing cognitive development used a combination of personal reflection on past experiences in relationship to their GEL experiences, and engaged in heritage discussions. In such discussions, students shared and processed their experiences with their peers. These conversations focused on how these experiences influenced how students thought about who they were or what they knew as a person of color in the U.S.

Recommendations
- Use findings to further refine the program curriculum prior to the next cohort (i.e., refine assignments to fit a fast-pace travelling schedule, refine student learning outcomes, ensure that curriculum and assessment align well with the learning outcomes, etc.)
- Review students’ video journals in a timely manner, so that staff members or student leads will be able to respond to students’ concerns promptly or to initiate a deeper discussion regarding the issues associated with new experience and/or environment
- Develop plans to conduct longitudinal assessment, enabling the monitoring and reporting of long-term program impact and its relationship to student success outcomes (e.g., GPA, retention and graduation rates).